



HISTORY OF BALLYCROCHAN BAPTIST CHURCH

Early beginnings

In every generation God has chosen a man or a woman to give a lead in a specific area of His work. Such was the case in the drive behind the establishment of the church at Ballycrochan. The origins of the fellowship in the main are due largely to the vision, zeal and enthusiasm of Welsh Dunn, a member of Hamilton Road Baptist Church in Bangor.

Ballycrochan is the second Baptist church to be planted by the Hamilton Road church. Rosemary Park was the first in September 1964 when fifty-five members were transferred to constitute the fledgling church.

One of the early events in the formation of the Ballycrochan church was the gift of a bungalow on a site at 43 Dixon Road, Bangor, which measured 150' x 50'. This had been bequeathed to the Hamilton Road church by the late Mrs Jane Carlisle in her will on 22 February 1963. The site was too small for development and was sold for £3,700.

Ballycrochan site

Early in 1973 Welsh Dunn, Jim Taylor and Robert Campbell were asked by the Hamilton Road church to explore the possibility of obtaining a site for a church building in the Ballycrochan area. Having considered a number of possible sites the small committee was unanimous in the choice of the present site where the Ballycrochan church now stands.

Welsh Dunn was given the task of negotiating the possible purchase of this site with Blakiston-Houston Estate Co. through their secretary, Robert Ramsey. Agreement was reached on the purchase of half-an-acre of ground costing £1,500. Blakiston-Houston owned 240 feet wide of this field, which bordered the Donaghadee Road. Mr Dunn made an approach to Mr T H Lowry who owned the remainder of the field for an additional portion of land for access and car parking. This was readily agreed and given free of charge upon payment of the legal fees.

Planning authorities directed that the church building be positioned five metres further back from the Ballycrochan Road than was originally planned. After further negotiations with the owners they gave an additional quarter of an acre free of charge. The cost of the enlarged rent-free site together with legal fees amounted to £1,500. Total area of site was 1.28 acres. On payment of this amount Blakiston-Houston forwarded as a further gift a cheque for £700.

Prayer meetings

During the autumn of 1974 Mr Dunn was instrumental in establishing prayer and bible study in the home of Mr & Mrs Edward (Ted) Durling in Cotswold Avenue. Eleven attended the first meeting amongst whom were Mr & Mrs S Gillespie, Mr &

Mrs J N Law, Mr & Mrs R Dunn, Miss Millie Oswald, Mr Welsh Dunn, Mrs M Honeyford and Mr H Honeyford (no relation)

Later when Mr & Mrs Durling moved to England, Cedric and Gwen Davies opened their home for prayer at 9 Silverbirch Glen in September 1977. During this time an increasing number of young married couples took a definite interest in attending and supporting the prayer efforts. The numbers attending had increased to around 30. Derek Hutchinson had been invited to lead one of the prayer meetings and following Mr Hutchinson's induction as Associate pastor in Hamilton Road church on 6 March 1979 he continued to lend support to the Ballycrochan prayer group.

Interest in the proposed establishment of a church continued and in October 1980 the group moved to the home of Dan & Ivy Connor at 1 Dixon Park, Bangor. Later the following year the group moved to the home of Elizabeth McManus at 249 Donaghadee Road, until the church building was opened in January 1983.

In tandem with the above mentioned prayer efforts and from the earliest origins and vision to plant a church in Ballycrochan, half nights of prayer were held in the Hamilton Road church together with mid-week prayer meetings asking God to reveal His will for possible future developments. Those who continued in prayer were convinced that the leading of the Holy Spirit was to plan and forge ahead.

Children's meetings

The winter of 1979 saw the commencement of a children's meeting in the home of Cedric and Gwen Davis. Marion Hutchinson, Gwen Davis and Margaret Vance led the meetings. The following year Tom Vance and Caroline Patterson joined the team. Sometime later the meetings were transferred to the home of Joe and Lila Patterson. Tom Vance and Caroline Patterson were responsible for conducting these meetings.

Holiday Bible Club

In the late 1970's and early 1980's five-day Holiday Bible Clubs were held in the Hamilton Road church for children from the Ballycrochan area who were transported daily by bus. Jenny Wark and Ivy Connor led these clubs. Many of the children who attended later formed the nucleus of the Sunday School at Ballycrochan.

Building work

On 27 February 1979, Joe Patterson was appointed a deacon in the Hamilton Road church. With Mr Patterson's drive and encouragement the plans and building construction took shape and began to move forward. Liaising with McAdam Design Partnership, Mr McDaid the Quantity Surveyor and the builders Messrs D Connolly & Son whose tender of £117,235 had been accepted.

The work on the building commenced on 11 January 1982 and was completed at 12.45 pm on 8 January 1983. Mr Noel Harper, electrician, was responsible for the electrical work and Mr Hunt was the plumbing contractor.

Opening ceremony

The opening ceremony was held on Saturday afternoon 8 January 1983 and was performed by Mrs Margaret Honeyford. Some 400 people attended. The afternoon was chilly but permitted most of the congregation to assemble outside. Derek

Hutchinson led those assembled in the dedication ceremony after which Mr H Honeyford, formerly an elder of the Hamilton Road church prayed for God's blessing on the new congregation of 60 members who, on Wednesday 5 January 1983 had been transferred from Hamilton Road to form the new congregation at Ballycrochan. After the singing of the hymn 'How good is the God we adore' Mrs M Honeyford performed the door opening ceremony.

The main service began at 3.00 pm and was conducted by Derek Hutchinson. Welsh Dunn gave an informative account of the beginnings and development of the work right up to the completion of the church building. Jim Taylor brought greetings from the Hamilton Road church and led the prayer of dedication. Pastor J R Grant (Secretary of the Baptist Union of Ireland) brought greetings from the sister churches and Pastor W J K Byers, Pastor of the Rosemary Park church conveyed warmest greetings. Pastor R Dunlop (President of the Baptist Union of Ireland) ministered to the new church on 'The marks of a gospel church.' Mrs Leslie Campbell and the ladies of Hamilton Road and Ballycrochan churches provided light refreshments.

A praise service was held at 6.30 pm. Tom Vance chaired this meeting. Pastor Grant preached on 'Fellowship within the church' and the day was drawn to a close with a focus on Ephesians 3: 20-21: 'Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine'

Financial implications

In reviewing the financial costs it is interesting to note that the site and legal fees cost £1,500; the building contract amounted to £117,000; architects' fees £9,532; chairs, furnishings and hymnbooks £7,600; electricity installation £1,123; carpets, kitchen equipment and other incidentals £3,000. Total cost £140,000. Income at that stage was £59,714, which left a debt of £80,000. Interest free loans amounted to £45,150 with one loan totaling £40,000.

Gifts

The following gifts were donated to the new church: public address system and clock in the vestry was donated by Mr John Bell; the desk in the vestry was a gift from Mrs R I Dunn; Mr J R Johnston donated the hymn board; and Mr Joe Patterson donated the flower-stand.

First members' meeting

The first church members' meeting was held at Ballycrochan on 18 January 1983.

Foundation members

There were 60 foundation members:

Aicken, Tom & Rose	Honeyford, Margaret	Patterson, Joe & Lila
Baird, Doreen	Hutchinson, Derek & Marion	Patterson, Caroline
Best, David & Doreen	Kelly, Andrew & Ann	Patton, Ken & Mary
Connor, Dan & Ivy	Laird, Chris	Roberts, Jacqueline
Cruise, Muriel	Lockhart, Billy & Audrey	Roche, Pat & Elizabeth
Currie, Eleanor	McManus, Elizabeth	Topping, Bob & Vi
Davis, Cedric & Gwen	McClelland, Sarah	Vance, J
Dunn, Welsh & Miriam	McMaster, Alex & Vivienne	Vance, Margaret

Edgar, Alan & Roberta
Graham, Eileen
Graham, Eleanor
Hardy, Ron & Charlotte
Honeyford, Herbert

Nixon, George & Vivienne
Nixon, John & Cherie
Oehring, Beatrice
Patrick, Hugh & Lily
Patrick, Billy & Pamela

Vance, Tom & Emily
Vance, Wilfred & Betty
Wallace, Ann
Wark, Sam & Jenny

Appointment of first pastor

At a members' meeting held on 15 March 1983, Derek Hutchinson was appointed pastor of the congregation at Ballycrochan. Derek ministered at Ballycrochan until 20 February 1993 when he responded to a call from the church at Letterkenny. Derek and Marion had two sons, Gareth and Stuart, and a daughter, Judith.

New church hall

Thursday 3 September 1987 marked another significant step in the life of the Ballycrochan church. The growth in the Sunday school and Campaigners was such that the main church building was no longer adequate and a new hall became a priority. The timber-frame building measuring 90' x 35' comprising a large ground floor hall provided ample space for the various youth activities and mid-week meetings. Youth groups and Sunday School in particular benefited from the first floor roof section which incorporated twelve individual classrooms. Tom Robinson, the architect officially opened the hall on 3 September 1987. He then handed the key to the church secretary, Sam Wark. The cost of the new hall, fittings and furniture and car park amounted to approximately £140,000.

Appointment of second pastor

Stephen Cave, was inducted to the pastorate at Ballycrochan on 23 June 1995. Stephen remained in Ballycrochan until the 31 December 2000 when he resigned from the pastorate to take up an appointment as General Secretary of Evangelical Alliance in Northern Ireland. During this period, Stephen and Nicola had a son, Ben.

Assistant pastor

Phillip Vallely was inducted as Assistant Pastor at Ballycrochan on 5 September 1997. During Phillip's period of ministry he married Miss Moyra Quigley. On completion of his 3 year contract Phillip left Northern Ireland on 11 August 2000 together with Moyra and baby son, Ethan, to take up an appointment as assistant pastor in a church at Winkler, Manitoba, Canada. Phillip has since returned to the province to take up an appointment as regional development co-ordinator with SIM Ireland. Phillip and Moyra now have another son, Caleb.

Appointment of third pastor

Dr Robin Ruck was inducted to the pastorate at Ballycrochan on 7 June 2002. Robin was the former pastor of Hayfields Baptist Church, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa, and he relocated to Bangor with his wife, Ingrid, daughter, Shelley and son, Gareth.